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# News Release



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## **RARE HAWAIIAN BIRD RELEASED ON KAUA'I**

Eighteen puaiohi (pu-ai-o-he), a critically endangered bird species native to the island of Kaua'i are in the process of being released into the Alaka'i Wilderness Area. The release of these birds will take place over several weeks as the birds are allowed to fly from aviaries in the forest into their native forest habitat.

The birds, representing a species that is believed to number fewer than 500, were raised at the Keauhou Bird Conservation Center on the island of Hawai'i and the Maui Bird Conservation Center. The releases are part of a collaborative effort undertaken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), and the San Diego Zoo's Hawai'i Endangered Bird Conservation Program to build a sustainable population of these birds in the wild.

The puaiohi, also known as the small Kaua'i thrush, is a small songbird that has been reduced to a single relict population in the wet forest of the Alaka'i Wilderness Preserve. Habitat degradation caused by feral ungulates and invasive alien plants, and the joint threats from introduced predators and diseases are thought to be contributing factors in the decline of this population. More than half of Hawai'i's surviving songbirds are listed as endangered by the state and federal government.

"We have been able to release 95 captive-reared puaiohi back into the wilderness since 1999, and we believe these recruits are making a significant contribution to the recovery of the population," said Alan Lieberman, director of the Zoo's propagation efforts in Hawai'i.

Not all endangered bird species in Hawai'i have done as well. Last November, a po'ouli living at the Maui Bird Conservation Center died after two months in captivity. The two remaining individuals of the species, believed to possibly still survive in the wild, have not been spotted in more than a year.

"The loss of the only captive po'ouli last year was a clear demonstration of the urgent need to take action to save species before they dwindle to such low numbers," said Dr. Scott Fretz, Wildlife Program Manager for the State's DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife.

The captive puaiohi are flown to Lihue, Kaua'i then transported to the release site. At the release site they are placed in an aviary where they spend 7-10 days adjusting to the environment. Over a period of five weeks, six birds at a time are staged for release in a series of three releases. Each bird is fitted with a radio transmitter that will relay signals allowing biologists to monitor their movements, health and range.

"The success of this puaiohi release program, and of others such as the nene release program, gives us great hope for the future of Hawai'i's endangered birds," said Gina Shultz, acting field supervisor for the Fish and Wildlife Service's Pacific islands office. "Captive propagation and release programs clearly are an important part of our recovery efforts, and we join with our partners in wishing these 18 birds a long and happy life in the Alaka'i."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

The DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife is responsible for the management of state-owned forests, natural areas, public hunting areas, and plant and wildlife sanctuaries. Program areas cover watershed protection; native resources protection, including unique ecosystems and endangered species of plants and wildlife; outdoor recreation; and commercial forestry.

The Hawai'i Endangered Bird Conservation Program is a part of the San Diego Zoo's department of Conservation and Research for Endangered Species. CRES, operated by the not-for-profit Zoological Society of San Diego, is working to establish field stations in five key ecological areas internationally and participates in conservation and research work around the globe. The Zoological Society also manages the 100-acre San Diego Zoo and the 1,800-acre San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park (more than half of which has been set aside as protected native species habitat).

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